

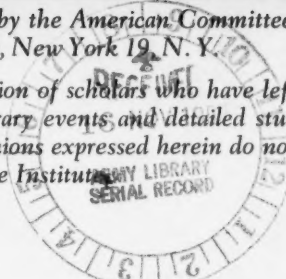
Russia

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SOVIET AFFAIRS ANALYSIS SERVICE

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Outline of Reference Paper On:

THE SOVIET CAMPAIGN AGAINST "RELICS OF CAPITALISM"

by

Vasily M. Minyailo

Although the Soviet Union has supposedly reached the threshold of the ultimate Communist stage in social evolution, Soviet leaders are seriously concerned about the survival of alleged capitalist traits among the Soviet population, especially among the younger generation. This problem, discussed by Khrushchev, Suslov and other government leaders at the Twenty-first Party Congress early this year, has been subjected since the Congress to an exhaustive analysis in all the various Soviet communications media. The convenient absence of any precise and authoritative definition of "relics of capitalism" in earlier Communist literature permits Soviet publicists to fit this label to every conceivable vice and defect in the present-day USSR. Bourgeois nationalism, speculation, moral delinquency, the antics of gilded youth (the so-called Stilyagi), even the prevalence of bad language, are all ascribed at times to this cause.

But a mass of testimony in the current Soviet press contradicts this propaganda picture. Soviet youth, in addition to labor burdens which have already reduced its recreational opportunities to a minimum, now faces the curtailment of educational horizons imposed by the Khrushchev school reform and new restrictions on its personal and professional mobility in connection with the Seven-Year Plan. These blows have thrown the younger generation into a state of psychological confusion and loss of faith in the Soviet system whose at times violent and delinquent symptoms certainly cannot be attributed to "capitalist" influences. This general loss of confidence, itself the product of inherent contradictions in Soviet society, is reflected in the weakened state of contemporary Communist theory and ideological training.

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THE SOVIET CAMPAIGN AGAINST "RELICS OF CAPITALISM"

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Communist Party leaders in the USSR have recently unleashed a campaign against what they call "relics of capitalism in the consciousness of the people." This new hunt for a scapegoat is just one more attempt to find an excuse for the failure of the Soviet system to solve the social problems which the system itself has created.

The Central Committee of the CPSU is giving considerable attention to the problems posed by the growing influence of "relics of capitalism" upon the thinking of Soviet citizens, especially upon Soviet youth.

The Twenty-First Party Congress, held in late January and early February 1959, discussed at length the problem of combatting this influence. Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev declared at the Congress that the abolition of these relics of capitalism was one of the main prerequisites for the successful advance of Soviet society from socialism to Communism. Khrushchev said:

For these reasons we attach exceptionally great significance to questions of the Communist education of the workers, ... to strengthening the ideological educational work of the Party and raising the level of Communist consciousness of the workers and above all of the younger generation. They must be trained in the spirit of a Communist attitude to labor, of Soviet patriotism. ... relics of capitalism in the People's consciousness must be overcome and the struggle with bourgeois ideology won (Pravda, January 28, 1959).

In the first number of the Party theoretical journal Kommunist to appear after the Congress, Ilyichev, who heads the Agitation and Propaganda section of the Party Central Committee issued an even more specific warning against the danger to the Communist cause from such relics of capitalism:

It must not be forgotten that in our time relics of capitalism in the consciousness of the people are possible and actually still exist. They are a hindrance to the cause of Communist construction... . The Party is faced, as are all social organizations, with new problems in the Communist education of people which it was never necessary to solve before. (Kommunist, 1959, No. 2, pp. 28, 30).

From February 1959 on all Soviet propaganda media have been conducting a campaign aimed at exposing and eradicating those evils of Soviet society which have ostensibly been inherited from capitalism. The Soviet press and radio carried a great amount of material on the problem and the theoretical Party journals devoted much attention to it. Television, motion pictures, the theater, literature, and art were also called upon to take part in this drive. Numerous public discussions, debates, and seminars were held and adult education along these lines was aided by the opening of so-called "universities of culture" throughout the USSR.

What does the Party Central Committee mean by "relics of capitalism"? And what causes does it perceive for the increasing influence which these relics are said to exert on the Soviet people?

It is interesting and noteworthy that neither Marx nor Lenin provided definitions of the term "relics of capitalism", although both devoted much attention to this question in their writings. The absence of an authoritative definition makes it much easier for Soviet theoreticians to apply the phrase "relics of capitalism" to any and all defects of Soviet society even though they may be neither survivals of the pre-revolutionary system or features of the present capitalist world.

Among the "relics of capitalism" allegedly now present in the consciousness of Soviet citizens the Soviet leadership includes such failings as dislike of physical labor and social property, breaches of the rules of community living and Soviet legality, survivals of bourgeois nationalism, laziness, complacency, religious prejudice, moral dissipation, impoliteness toward women, banditry, hooliganism, speculation, cheating, bad language, foppishness, (stilyagism), kowtowing to the West, careerism, bribe-taking, conceit, toadying and so on.

These defects of Soviet society which are so disturbing to the Soviet leaders cannot be equated with any previous definition of the "relics of capitalism", even with that given in the latest edition of the Large Soviet Encyclopedia. Many of these "sins" cannot be regarded either as capitalist survivals within the USSR or as symptoms of decadence that have penetrated the USSR from the "disintegrating West". Let us cite here the definition of relics of capitalism actually given in the Large Soviet Encyclopedia:

The relics of capitalism in the consciousness of the people are survivals of private-property bourgeois ideology and psychology... views, concepts, habits, customs, traditions, and prejudices inherited from capitalist society. (Bolshaya Sovyetskaya Entsiklopediya), Vol. XXXII, Moscow, 1955, p. 409).

Such evils of Soviet society as cheating, laziness, conceit, careerism, toadying and foppishness can hardly be traced to foreign or capitalist origins alone, especially since they do not exist in such highly developed forms in any other social system. The same may be said of other alleged "relics" such as an irresponsible attitude toward public property expressed by theft and squandering, breaches of the rules of community life, morally degenerate behavior, polygamy, drunkenness, bribe-taking, foul language and rudeness to subordinates, all of which are characteristic of Soviet society and especially characteristic of its ruling class. Nor can the harsh conditions which most Soviet women are compelled to endure be easily matched elsewhere in the world. The fact that the Soviet regime forces women to undertake the heaviest labor on an equal basis with men actually has the effect of lowering women's status and destroying in Soviet society all natural respect for the weaker sex.

The increasing symptoms of psychological crisis among youth which are contributing to the growth of crime and other delinquencies deserve closer attention. The present leadership of the Party Central Committee has returned to the old methods of rule after the relative "liberalism" of the "thaw" period. The entire Soviet population and in particular the younger generation are deeply disillusioned with this new turn of events. To help construct the "final" Communist stage of society, the Soviet government has decreed the Khrushchev school reform and has called for fresh sacrifices on the part of Soviet youth on behalf of the Seven-Year Plan. The younger generation sees its prospects of advanced schooling vanishing through these new measures. It is not surprising that Soviet youth are increasingly disillusioned with the theory and practice of Communism and are to a great extent involved in a psychological crisis which assumes the most varied forms, including the various "sins" which the Party leadership now calls "relics of capitalism". The Soviet leaders do not dare to call such disillusionment by its real name, but at the same time they cannot conceal its existence.

The Soviet press has been devoting increasing attention to this loss of belief in an attempt to account for its causes. Here are some recent cases culled from its pages:

Viktor Sidorov, a seventeen-year-old boy convicted of theft and condemned to five years imprisonment, expressed his views on life and his own future in an interview with a correspondent of Komsomolskaya Pravda:

I have never in my life seen a person who would go out of his way for another.... Everybody in the world is a rascal.... Believe me, it was all the same to me-- all the same whether I was convicted, acquitted, or given a suspended sentence. (Komsomolskaya Pravda, June 9, 1959).

Tamara, an eighteen-year-old Komsomol member who was expecting a child by a convicted criminal serving a prison sentence, gave the following reason for her broken life:

What did we know about life, about love, about human relations? Really they occupy no less important a place in life than questions of machinery and production. I became a machinist but I couldn't build my own life. Of love, of the world around us we knew nothing or at least not what we should have known. (Ibid., June 7, 1959)

No less characteristic of the experiences and outlook on life of present-day Soviet youth is the story told by a Komsomol girl named Galya Kandasheva. After fourth grade she had to leave school and went to work on a collective farm. She now works in a factory. She has to spend 17 hours a week on the train going to and from work. In addition the factory's Komsomol organization, which is training her as a future "shock worker" of Communist labor, requires her to attend various political classes every day. When she began to skip these classes the authorities would not allow her to leave the factory early. She continued to boycott the political classes although she was badgered to the point of attempting suicide. After this unsuccessful suicide attempt she said this of her life:

"There is no happiness in life... No one goes out of his way for us. Good people are only written about in books but in life it is not like that at all." After this she was further harassed because, disillusioned by life, she turned to God and joined a religious congregation. (Komsomolskaya Pravda, June 17, 1959)

Soviet young people are unable to reconcile themselves to the Party leadership's demands that they sacrifice their rights to education, to a free choice of their life profession, to the right to choose where they will live and work and to a secure private life. Soviet youth will not accept

this kind of Communism. Vasily Lageida, a young machinist in the Kharkhov tractor plant spends more than 15 hours a day at work including travel-time. He complains that he has no time left to go to the cinema or read a good book even occasionally:

If we are to build Communism is it necessary for us only to work and to be commuters? Must we also sacrifice our dreams of learning and recreation? I have become stale and the circle of my interests is getting narrow. (Molod Ukrainy March 6, 1959)

Vera P., from Lvov, writes in similar vein:

In our country where all roads are "opened up" to youth suddenly someone chooses the lot of a cleaning woman or goes to a construction site to haul rocks. Yes, you can't deny it....it's certainly romantic! (Komsomolskaya Pravda, June 21, 1959)

The Soviet press is filled with such frank statements and with editorial comment on them. The Soviet leaders vainly attempt to justify their calls for the increased political indoctrination of Soviet youth on the grounds that it is youth that not only must build Communism but must also live in it in the future. When they declare that "between the Socialist mind and the Communist mind there are no differences in principle of any kind" (Kommunist, 1959, No. 3), the leaders of the Party Central Committee are refuting their own arguments. Soviet youth simply does not accept the more "advanced" Communist ideas, nor can this rejection be ascribed to ideological backwardness or survivals of capitalist mentality. Soviet young people have been molded exclusively by the social system now existing in the USSR. Their faults correspond closely to this system, as Soviet publicists are now conceding with increasing frankness. "Do you mean to say that his father teaches him to drink vodka, to use bad language and to act like a hooligan?" asks a young worker from Dnepropetrovsk named Evgeny Khalilo. He answers his own question by quoting Lenin's saying that "life determines consciousness." (Komsomolskaya Pravda, February 24, 1959).

The same view appears in writings on Communist theory. Leaders of the Party Central Committee, in their attempt to conceal the real reasons for the society's "sins" call any truly theoretical interpretation of Marxism-Leninism "vulgar materialism", and demand that Marxism be understood not as an inflexible teaching regarding the laws of social development but as a "weapon for action", whose application depends for its success upon its effective use in terms of existing conditions. Nevertheless, analysis of many theoretical articles of a conciliatory type emanating from the Party Central Committee which have appeared in recent months, indicates that the Central Committee

leaders themselves now understand that fulminations against "relics of capitalism" or against isolated instances of failure in the work of indoctrination are only weak attempts to cover up the failure of the system of ideological education for Soviet citizens and to mask the developing general crisis within Communist ideology. This crisis appears in the fields of the theoretical development of Marxist-Leninist philosophy and of the indoctrination of the general population with Marxist-Leninist teachings through the media of art, literature, motion pictures, theater, radio, television, and the Party press.

Ilyichev has this to say about the present state of Marxist-Leninist theory in the USSR:

The new tasks require us to ignore those ideological workers who are afraid to deal with problems connected with the building of Communism.... These "theoreticians" are marked by timidity, they try to escape into the field of general ideas or to dig into past events without any scientific significance. Such people cannot help the Party to develop the correct theories to guide its path through the most important historical processes now in progress.... The result is that life and work are far ahead of theory. The Party and the people are creating a new world with new forms, but the poor theoreticians continue to dawdle along at the tail of events." (*Kommunist*, 1959, No. 2, p. 31)

Party education is in an even more unsatisfactory state:

This field is hampered by bureaucracy and red tape. The stamp and the stencil are the death of constructive ideological work.... An end must be made to such basic weaknesses as the inability of our propagandists to speak clearly and convincingly of the great victories and accomplishments of socialism.... The raising of the level of ideological work depends entirely upon improved cadres. (*Ibid.*, pp. 32-33)

The indoctrination of school children in the fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism is in an even more parlous state, and the publishing of popular literature on ideological questions, which is the main means of indoctrinating the mass of Soviet citizens, is also not making satisfactory progress.

The philosophy and economic institutes of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR have largely ceased to study questions of Communist education and Communist morality. The Universities and Institutes, particularly the

the Pedagogical Institute do not teach courses in ethics and do not devote the necessary attention to problems of Communist morality. Popular brochures, lectures and articles are very rarely published on these topics. The isolated articles which do appear often contain incorrect views... Some authors wrongly explain the reasons for the continued existence of relics of capitalism in the Soviet people's consciousness. They account for the survival of old habits and views by the drawbacks inherent in the socialist principle of distribution and not, as they should, in distortions of it. (Ibid, p.29)

A later issue of Kommunist presents a very discouraging evaluation of the content of the ideological work of cultural and educational institutions; i.e. "many clubs have been transformed into special commercial institutions managed by fulltime administrators who think only of fulfilling a financial plan..." (Ibid., No. 3, p.70-71).

The last issue of Kommunist subjected Soviet art, literature, motion pictures, theater, radio television and the press to sharp criticism for lack of fresh ideological concepts, for kowtowing to foreign ideology and for disseminating "stupid" and narrow-minded taste to the Soviet people.

In our era the petty-bourgeois class has concealed its true character behind a pretended "agreement" with the greatest contemporary ideals. Under the guise of "artistic service" to our people the petty bourgeois class has lowered levels of taste with its trivial songs, sugary pictures, superfluous ornament in architecture, commonplace plays and melancholy bar-room motives in the films... Nor is the petty bourgeois class averse to playing itself up at times as the defender of the "ultra new" and the "dernier cri" of fashion which really means kowtowing to Western bourgeois culture and ideology. (Ibid., No. 4, p.37).

The same article accuses Soviet films and television of popularizing "anti-artistic" work and disseminating bad taste. The Party press is also criticized for maintaining an inexplicable silence concerning the struggle against the penetration of foreign ideology into the consciousness of the Soviet people. As the journal of the Party Central Committee, Kommunist's critiques represent official opinion on the highest level.

No aspect of the entire Soviet system of ideological indoctrination and reeducation of the population fails to illustrate the current crisis of Communist ideology. The Party leadership cannot hide this crisis although it continues to place the blame for all its own failures upon "relics of the past", "the tenacity of the birthmarks of capitalism."etc. The Party has no other recourse since it cannot combat the social failings of Soviet society without attacking those essential features of the Soviet system which have engendered them.

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